How Do We Live Well With Others?: Readings in the History of Western Political Thought

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Description: How do we know what is right? What are our obligations to others and to ourselves? What does formal government have to do with right action? This undergraduate lecture course will ask these questions by way of a historical introduction to canonical texts in western political thought. We will think through the concepts of justice, virtue, goodness, governance, rights, and property, applying them to present-day problems of equal distribution and technological life. This course is different from other courses in the history of political thought in that we will focus on using close reading to encounter these texts. Class time will emphasize discussion, reading and re-reading the text, etc. Students will gain not only a familiarity with key texts and problems in the history of political theory, but also the confidence to approach and dissect difficult texts on their own.

Assignments: Each third of the course will be structured around different kinds of assignments to build up skills in close reading and group discussion.

(Weeks 1-3) Graded Annotations and Reading Responses: During the first section, students will complete weekly graded annotations of assigned texts. Short printed excerpts of assigned texts for the week will be distributed at the beginning of the week, for students to return with their annotations at the end. This does not mean you shouldn't read the rest of what's assigned! These excerpts are designed to give practice in interacting with texts directly, with the support of instructor feedback. Students will also complete a weekly handwritten reading response (2-3 pages), using at least 4 pieces of textual evidence, and culminating in 2 questions arising from the text.

(Weeks 4-7) Reading Responses and Midterm: In the second section students will continue reading responses, while preparing for a traditional written midterm exam during Week 6. The midterm will consist of three sections: term definitions (2 short, 2 long), quote IDs, and an essay question. The two short definitions will ask for basic facts about a thinker or concept. The two long definitions will ask for a paragraph that uses textual evidence to outline the history of a concept from the course, e.g. virtue or distribution. Quote IDs will ask you to identify the thinker and approximate date associated with a quotation. Essay questions will be relatively open-ended. A handout with a bank of possible quotations, concepts, and essay questions will be distributed in advance of the exam.

(Weeks 8-10) Civics Labs: The last third of the class will introduce group work in the form of "Civics Labs." This is a chance to put what we've learned in the class about living well with one another into active practice, both in the content of this assignment and in the group work you will undertake to approach it. In groups assigned by discussion section leaders, students will choose a core question from the last third of the course (technology, diversity, or distribution). They will then create a presentation that introduces the question by presenting historical ways of thinking

about and answering it. Groups will then introduce an "innovation," a new concept, practical element of governance, or idea that integrates their chosen present-day problem with the texts we explore in class. At the end of the Civics Lab experience, students will submit a 2-page reflection on the experience of working with others, what worked, what did not, and what the Lab revealed about matters discussed in the course.

Note on Reading: This course is reading-intensive. It assumes that a good way to encounter historical texts is through reading carefully with attention to context when helpful. A core learning outcome of this course is a "reading toolkit:" an approach that works for you to confront texts commonly understood as "difficult." To this end, in this course, *we all begin from the same point*, notwithstanding any prior coursework or knowledge. I am convinced that every single one of you have the power to do brilliantly in this course, given *attention* and *time*. You may have to read parts of assigned texts multiple times; we will also go over excerpts in class and in discussion section. It is often good practice to read a text before and after lecture to clear up remaining questions. These are texts that benefit from reading and re-reading over a lifetime; there are no final answers, only better-thought questions. The skills you develop in this class—reading, writing, and communicating with others—are invaluable, no matter the path that lies ahead of you.

Prepare to be **surprised**! A delightful part of reading is that you never know what a thinker has up their sleeve. For this reason, it's really important to stay attentive and open to the readings at hand and what they might have to tell you. One strategy to aid in reading efficiently is to approach texts with the following questions in mind, in this order: What does this say (e.g., in my own words, can I re-phrase the sentence)? How does it say it (what strategies does the author use to convey their point)? What does this imply (if this is true, what else might also be true)? What questions do I have?

Classroom Etiquette: In this course, we will be learning not only the contents of political theory, but also how to *act* civilly among one another in our classroom community. Please assume the best out of your classmates, the texts at hand, and yourselves. What is the best, most charitable reading of what your colleague, or the text, has to say? Ask clarifying questions where necessary—to respect someone is to try your best to understand them. No willful misunderstanding, derogatory speech, or *ad hominem* arguments will be tolerated.

Grade Breakdown:

Section Participation and Lecture Attendance: 25%

Annotations: 20%

Reading Responses: 25%

Midterm: 15%

Final Presentation and Reflection: 25%

Weekly Plan

SECTION 1: Foundations

WEEK 1: What is Justice?

Day 1: Plato, *Crito*

Day 2: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books 1-2

WEEK 2: What is Virtue?

Day 1: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 3

Day 2: Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (focus on Sections I and II)

WEEK 3: What is Goodness?

Day 1: Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (focus on Section III)

Day 2: Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Priniciples of Morals and Legislation*, ch. 1, ch. 2, ch. 7

SECTION 2: Being Governed

WEEK 4: What is Rule?

Day 1: Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pt. XVII, XVIII, and XXI

Day 2: Rousseau, *Social Contract*, Book 2

WEEK 5: What is Society?

Day 1: Max Weber, *Basic Concepts in Sociology*, "On the Concept of Sociology and the Meaning of Social Conduct"

Day 2: Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, Sections 1 and 3

WEEK 6: What are Rights? | **MIDTERM (in section)**

Day 1: J.S. Mill, *On Liberty*, ch. 1, 4

Day 2: John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government,* ch. 5; Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, "Human Requirements and Division of Labor Under the Rule of Private Property"

WEEK 7: What is Democracy?

Day 1: Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, excerpts

Day 2: Hannah Arendt, “Ideology and Terror”; Michael Walzer, “Exclusion, Injustice, and the Democratic State”

Section 3: Innovations | **CIVICS LABS BEGIN**

WEEK 8: Who are the People?

Day 1: Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question;” Charles Mills, “’Ideal Theory’ as Ideology”

Day 2: Catharine MacKinnon, *Towards a Feminist Theory of the State*, ch. 1, 3, 12

WEEK 9: Who Should Have What?

Day 1: John Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, ch. 3

Day 2: Robert Nozick, “Distributive Justice,” excerpts; Thomas Nagel, “The Problem of Global Justice”

WEEK 10: Can We Think Technology Theoretically?

Day 1: Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology”

Day 2: Phil Agre, “Surveillance and Capture: Two Models of Privacy;” Kafka, “The Trial,” excerpts

FINALS WEEK: Final Presentations